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MAN-POWER.

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY

GENERAL SIR A. HUNTER-WESTON, M.P.

(*In the* HOUSE OF COMMONS, *January 24th*, 1918.)

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Photo: Swaine.

GENERAL SIR A. HUNTER-WESTON, M.P., K.C.B., D.S.O.

"Let us have co-operation and mutual confidence—soldiers and politicians, the naval man, the civilian, and the military, working hand-in-hand, helping each other, for all are needed."

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

GENERAL SIR AYLMER HUNTER-WESTON, K.C.B., D.S.O., was elected Member of Parliament for North Ayrshire last year, and he delivered his maiden speech in the debate on the Military Service Bill (Man-Power) in the House of Commons on January 24th, 1918.

The speech, reprinted in the following pages, was an eloquent appeal to the nation, and especially to the young men of the nation, for solidarity of effort in the final stages of the Great War.

This solidarity of effort, GENERAL HUNTER-WESTON urged, is vitally important to ensure a victory which will give us the only peace which will be a lasting peace; the only peace which will not be treason to the heroes who have passed before us over the "Great Divide"; the only peace which will safeguard our honour and the prosperity of our people; and the only peace which will ensure the triumph of right, liberty, and justice.

GENERAL HUNTER-WESTON has had a brilliant military career. He served in the Miranzai Expedition in 1891; with the Waziristan Field Force in 1894-5 (in which he was wounded); he held a command in the South African War; he was in charge of the famous 29th Division at Gallipoli; and he is now a Corps Commander in Flanders.

The Question of Man-Power

It is with great diffidence that I rise to make my first speech in this Assembly. I am a plain, blunt soldier, more accustomed to the ways of war than the eloquence of Parliament. But from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh, and **the question of man-power, with which this Bill is concerned, is of such vital importance to us who are fighting your battles at the front** that, as a serving soldier at present commanding an Army Corps in Flanders, I cannot refrain from giving you the thoughts and feelings of my comrades of all ranks at the front.

I speak not as a General only. Among the many true friends and trusty comrades I have among those who are risking their lives, and more than their lives, none are truer or more valued by me than my friends and comrades in the ranks. And it is as one who has had the privilege of sharing with his men danger, sickness, and privation that I venture to speak haltingly and feebly, but from a full heart, in their name to-night.

WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR.

Our Army, your Army, the flower of the manhood of these Islands and of the great self-governing Dominions across the seas, is in magnificent fettle, full of courage and confidence and unconquerable cheeriness, imbued with a magnificent spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty, determined to "stick it out" doggedly when it is a question of defence, and ready to strike, and strike hard, when the time comes for attack or counter-attack.

But we need men, and, above all, we need the confidence and co-operation of the nation. We need that every man and woman at home, and everyone in the Army abroad, should have confidence in each other, and that each and all should exert all their strength, physical, mental, and moral, to help to win the War.

Let there be no mistake. We are fighting for our national existence; we are fighting for our lives, and for the lives and honour of our women and children. **If we do not now beat Germany and make her people feel that militarism does not pay, she will attack us again when we have not so many Allies, and if she does, and if she wins, she will do to us all, and more than all, that she has done to Serbia, to Belgium, and to Northern France. She will destroy us utterly.**

She has scourged the small nations with whips. If she succeeds

in a second campaign against us she will scourge us with scorpions. Germany is waging war not for military supremacy only, but also for commercial supremacy, and to attain this commercial supremacy she undoubtedly desires to destroy the productivity of the working classes of the United Kingdom.

IF GERMANY WERE TO WIN.

I am no believer in distinction of classes. We as a nation stand or fall together, and what affects one part of the nation affects all; but **undoubtedly those who would suffer most by a German victory are the working classes in this country.** See how Germany has removed all machinery from Belgium and Northern France! See how she has forced the workmen of Belgium to work as quasi-slaves for German taskmasters! See how she has torn the young women of Northern France from their homes and sent them to a fate their parents know not what! **It is the working men and women of the conquered territories that have suffered most at German hands.** I hope that hon. Members will make this great fact known to the people of this country.

If she got the chance she would do the same by us. She would destroy our factories and shipbuilding yards, remove our machinery, injure our wharves and harbours, so that, having taken away our means of production, she would leave our people to starve. If you wish to realise what a fate you would lay up for your children and for your old age, I would say to you: "Come and see the reconquered territory. Come and see that land of desolation, of destruction, and of death."

Of German atrocities you have incontrovertible evidence in the Report of Lord Bryce's Commission, but as the spoken word is worth a wilderness of paper, I will ask you to pardon me if I give you an example from my own experience. My advanced troops had entered a certain town in Northern France from which they had driven the Germans. The women of the town came to us scattering flowers and greeting us with cries of "*Nous sommes sauvées!*" ("We are saved!"). A sturdy peasant woman of France cried to me, as commander of the advanced guard, to press on my already quickly-moving troops to kill the retreating fiends who had raped her daughter publicly before her very eyes.

THE COMB OUT IN FRANCE.

Can you wonder, then, that I beg you to support the Government in their determination to give the Army the young men it needs to carry this War through to victory? Objection has been taken that there are still many men capable of being combed out in France. If steps were not being taken to comb out in France at the same time as in England I think this would be a most fair and valid criticism.

From my own experience and knowledge, however—and I speak, I may say, from the very useful standpoint of one who is sufficiently high in the scale to be able to get a general view, while not so high up that I am in any way responsible either for policy or for strategy; therefore, I think I may fairly claim to speak on the subject—within recent times the harrow has been passed over the men behind the line in France, and with very considerable success.

Now again the process of combing out is being gone through, not with a harrow but with a very small tooth-comb. When every man has been combed out in France, and when every man has been employed in France that can be employed—and in this connection I may say that the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps are doing a most admirable work, and we soldiers owe and pay a great tribute of admiration and gratitude to these women for what they are doing—I say that **when every man has been combed out, and when every man has been replaced that can be replaced by a woman, there will still be need, and urgent need, for young men from this country.**

BRITAIN'S WHOLE EFFORT IS NEEDED.

Objection has furthermore been made that sufficient use has not been made of the best brains, and that there is a prejudice against the Territorials and the New Army men. Nothing could be further from the truth. When men are fighting for their lives and honour, as we are now, they ask, not who a man was, not whether he was a Regular, a Territorial, or a New Army man in the past; they ask who is the best man now? We want to get the best assistance to help us to win the war, and a man at the front is taken for what he *is*, and not for what he *was*.

I beg hon. Members to remember that the Army does not resent criticism. It welcomes it. It welcomes constructive and well-informed criticism, but destructive and ill-informed criticism is good for no portion of the nation at any time. It is especially bad in war, for it tends to reduce the morale and confidence, not only of the Army but of the nation. There are many points which might justly be criticised. There are faults. But I may say, from what I have seen out there, that every man in authority is honestly, constantly, and earnestly doing his best to minimise those faults and to overcome them. **Let us have co-operation and mutual confidence—soldiers and politicians, the naval man, the civilian, and the military, working hand-in-hand, helping each other, for all are needed.**

We at the front feel that the Army is but the point of the spear, of which the shaft is shipbuilding and the many other industries necessary for the successful prosecution of the War; the driving power is the determination, grit, and resolution of the nation to push that spear home to victory.

WHAT FIGHTING MEN ARE THINKING.

What most strikes an observant but at the present time a somewhat infrequent visitor to England and Scotland is the immense amount of courage, resolution, and self-sacrifice of the majority of the nation. There is a minority who are all too selfish, ignorant, and self-complacent. There are others—a few—who are vociferous, some of whom are honest, but mistaken, and who undoubtedly do a terrible lot of harm to our cause.

May I, as a representative of those at the front, appeal to those who are selfish from ignorance of the facts of the situation, to the really honest few, to do what they can to help us—to help the War by every means in their power?

Amongst the soldiers serving at the front, I may tell you, **there is a feeling, and a very strong feeling, of resentment against the number of young men who are serving at home in safe, comfortable, and extremely well-paid positions.** This feeling of resentment is very strong, and it will, I fear, last beyond the War.

It may also—this, I think, is an important point—cause a line of cleavage in the nation which will be very deplorable. But I defy any man with ordinary human feelings not to feel in sympathy with a gallant soldier when he comes to you and says, with ill-concealed resentment and heat in his tone, talking of these young "stay-at-homes," that he and his mates who have "done their bit" "will take good care to get even with those blessed skulkers"—as he calls them, only using another adjective!

A WORD TO YOUNG IRISHMEN.

Those of us who have had the privilege of serving with Irishmen and Irish regiments know the charm of that most lovable race, so unaccountable and difficult—if badly led; so glorious in heroism, so easily led to almost unbelievable flights of heroism, loyalty, and devotion—if only they are led by a strong, courageous man who knows what he wants, who has full human sympathy, and who has an iron determination. Are we at the front guilty of too great idealism, are we too great optimists, if we still hope that there will arise in Ireland some man, be he known or unknown now, who will prove to be such a leader, who will bring Ireland to take her rightful place beside America, France, and the great Dominions across the seas in fighting this great fight for liberty, justice, and right?

Through the poor agency, therefore, of the voice of one who has borne the burden of the War from the beginning, fighting alongside Irishmen and Irish regiments, may I say that your brother Irishmen and their true comrades in the Allied Armies who are fighting with them on the other side of the water, appeal to their comrades in Ireland who are young and who are still in Ireland, both North and South, to come out and carry on the great traditions and history of Ireland for patriotism, to come

in full strength and take their rightful place beside those who are fighting out there! **The future of these Islands, of the Empire, and of the world lies in the hands of the men who have fought and who are fighting. It is they who will undoubtedly mould and shape the world.**

A DUTY TO THE MEN AT THE FRONT.

The great majority out there have given up all voluntarily at the call of duty and have been fighting with the greatest devotion, gallantry, and self-sacrifice. It is those qualities of self-sacrifice, devotion and resolution which, applied hereafter, will have the effect, as I believe, in making these islands better and brighter places than ever they have been before.

May I, through this House, appeal to every man then who is under twenty-five, and who is, therefore, more indispensable in the front line than anywhere else, to come willingly to join the men there, to take his place alongside them, and so share the glory, the work; so that he will be able afterwards to join with them in making England, Scotland, and Ireland the place it ought to be? **Above all, let the men of England realise that they are directly and personally responsible for the lives of their fellow countrymen at the front, if by any action of theirs or their friends they restrict or retard in any way the necessary output of munitions of war, ships, aeroplanes, guns, ammunition—munitions of every kind.** These are the necessities of the situation out there. Guns, aeroplanes, munitions, are our life-savers. Without them our men suffer heavy casualties. With them, we can so deal with the enemy that our losses are reduced to a minimum.

Therefore, I would beg them to remember that **any interruption or cessation of work means wounds and death to us at the front.** A local defeat by the enemy has often much less serious military consequences than the stoppage of work by our fellow workers at home. It is only by the whole-hearted co-operation of the men and women at home with us who are fighting at the front that we can carry our cause to victory.

WHAT THE ARMY NEEDS.

In this, as in everything else, we require solidarity in the nation —between the nation which is the Army at home and the Army which is the nation at the front.

We need men. We specially need young men. We need men to work and fight on our front line, and to hold it. We need men to continue working on our many defensive lines. We need men to continue to improve the communications, on which so enormous an amount of work has been done during this past year. We need especially young men to train for offensive, and particularly counter-

offensive, actions, so that we may have strong, well-trained divisions with which to meet and defeat the enemy.

In this connection it is necessary for us all to face facts and to preserve a certain feeling of perspective and proportion. From a review of the general military situation we know that whatever the available force the enemy may bring against us on the Western Front there is no cause for despondency. The military situation is good. When America comes in it will be overwhelming. But until America is able to make her full strength felt there will undoubtedly be very hard fighting.

The Germans will attack. We hope they will attack. If they do attack, we shall undoubtedly defeat them. We may waive that. There are certain to be local temporary reverses, and I think it would be well for the British public to face this fact. I say, therefore, to all, let us have courage, confidence, and resolution. Do not let us fear to face facts. We are sure to have difficulties both at home and at the front, but the difficulties of the future are as nothing to the difficulties we have surmounted in the past. **Our position and resources are such that if only the nation will stick it out we are certain to win through.**

THE ONLY PEACE.

Germany is hard pressed. Her men are hungry and in distress. Her Allies are in even a worse plight. We in every respect are better off than she is. But her Army is still intact. Her leaders understand the merit and necessity of resolution. It is on *our* resolution, *our* determination, and *our* grit that the immense issues of the future now depend.

A great flood of liberty and justice has been surging against the great dam formed by the Prussian desire to attain a world domination, based on might and long-prepared military force. To the superficial observer the dam still seems to stand fast. But under the dam a steady, if unseen, process of disintegration has been going on, and some day the Dam of Might will burst and the great Flood of Right will carry all before it.

If only the Empire will but to herself be true; if all individuals and classes in the nation, which is the Army at home, will co-operate loyally with each other and with the Army, which is the nation at the front, standing resolutely shoulder to shoulder calmly, confidently and courageously, we are certain of ultimate victory and of the only peace which would be a lasting peace; the only peace which would not be treason to the heroes, your sons and brothers, who have passed before us over the "Great Divide"; the only peace to safeguard our honour and the prosperity of our people; and the only peace to ensure the triumph of right, liberty, and justice.

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